

Abstract Title:***Claremont Court Housing Scheme: a post-occupancy evaluation of Modernist dwellings supporting current spatial practices***

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Abstract:

This paper presents a post-occupancy evaluation of Claremont Court housing scheme involving an original examination of the experience of its current dwellers. Basil Spence designed Claremont Court (1959-62) as part of the City of Edinburgh Corporation Housing Committee's post-war housing drive. The post-war housing policy in Scotland was aimed to offer people better living conditions than those endured for so long in the slums as the legacy of the Industrial Revolution, and therefore Modernist architects were encouraged to experiment with new spatial layouts (Powers 2005). Although Claremont Court has been described as a civilized example of Modernist social housing (McWilliam et al. 1984; Gillon and McDowell 2010), we argue that its relevance relies on the fact that it acknowledged the contemporary cross-class desire of domestic privacy and domestic forms of leisure.

Despite the appalling living conditions of the slums, the experience of the post-war housing estates damaged the Modernist belief that better housing would necessarily result in a better society (Gold 2007). Jacobs (1961) challenged low-density suburban planning and functional zoning just after Young and Willmott (1957) provided an influential evaluation of post-war housing in London, criticising the sense of social isolation of residents and loss of community. These led to a renewed self-image of the architect as social engineer: Noble's contention (1963) that architecture could shape the user's behaviour believed on the meanings imposed by the architect. On the contrary, our research focuses on the users and aims to read the meaning of Claremont Court for its current dwellers. Our methodology is qualitative in nature, and it is supported by an initial analysis of archival material and relevant architectural and sociological literature, followed by the thematic analysis of in-depth interviews of a group of dwellers and the contextual mapping of their flats. Following Rapoport's theory of *nonverbal communication* (1982), we decode contextual mappings to read people's belongings in terms of their meaning and make inferences about the dwellers' living patterns.

The paper makes an original contribution to the literature by developing the first in-depth post-occupancy evaluation of Claremont Court through the examination of the spatial practices of its current dwellers. It argues that while the scheme responded to the growing desire for new types of home in the Britain of the 1960s, the design of its dwelling units seems able to successfully support the living patterns of its dwellers more than fifty years later. By highlighting those spatial features that mostly meet the needs of the current dwellers, our paper aims to inform future social housing design.

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